

**City of Red Lake Falls
City Hall Public Hearing
December 17, 2024
Minutes**

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, a public hearing of the City Council of the City of Red Lake Falls, Red Lake County, Minnesota was duly held in the Council Chambers of said City on the 17th day of December, 2024.

Members Present: Allen Bertilrud, Briana Ingraham, Joyce Kalbakdalen, Cheryl Matzke, Sara Kenfield, Neil Knaack

Members Absent: None

Others Present: Kathy Schmitz, Delray Sparby, Jane Thibert, Kyle Thibert, Steven Hams, Katie Dolan, Loreen Schmitz, Linda Schultz, Joel Schultz, Denise Olson, Nancy Sauve, Randy Sauve, Brad Swenson, Janet Wiskow, Beth Keller, Rob Conwell, Alice Conwell, Whitney Rupprecht, Brian Vathauer, Rusty Remick, Wes Largis, Mason Johnson, D'Anne Johnson, John Kleven, Briana Ingraham, Terry Schmitz, Kevin Brevik, Sarah Brevik, John Thibert, Mitch Bernstein

The meeting was called to order at 6:04 p.m.

The purpose of the public hearing was to give the public a chance to ask questions, express concerns and share ideas on the future of City Hall. The meeting was open to public comments and questions. Multiple residents in attendance came forward one by one to address the council, with concerns and questions. The following is a summary of the questions and discussion between the public, City Administrator and City Council.

One of the reoccurring concerns emphasized was the cost to taxpayers. It was noted that some taxpayers do not want to pay to tear down a building with historical significance. It was suggested that the fiscally responsible thing to do would be to come up with a plan and open bids to qualified contractors to come in and fix it up, maybe someone would build townhouses, or daycare. It was suggested that the council does not put stipulations on the sale of the building but let someone come in and do what they want, even if they fail, they have tried. It would provide taxable income, and no demolition cost.

One community member proposed organizing a brainstorming session with people that would like to see something happen to the building and decide what we need for the future of Red Lake Falls. It was also stated numerous times that it is important to keep the history of our town and the beautiful historical buildings we have left.

The council was asked to explain to the public why they want a new building, so the public could rationalize the request. Along with a proposal for relocation, and where it would be located. Mayor Bertilrud stated that overall, the biggest issue is the

inefficiency of this building. We are only using approximately 20% of the building and having to heat the other 80% of a building that is not being used. A building sitting empty starts to fall apart. Administrator Schmitz shared that in 2024 the upstairs was used without rent for golf, lace 'em up camp and women of today events. The basement was used for elections and one library event for no charge and rented out for personal parties and meetings 15 times.

Mayor Bertilrud continued explaining that we have not talked about the size of the new community center, or where it would be located. We thought if we could sell this building, we would build it elsewhere. There are a lot of thoughts out there. Some cities have built a new library, community center and city offices all in one, and have received state financing for the bulk of the building. We have to do more research, and it may take a year to a year and half before we come to a conclusion. If we were to build a new, we would probably move the city office to the mall for a year or two during that process.

Administrator Schmitz stated that we applied for a USDA Grant for City Hall through congressional district spending, and we were denied by four different representatives. She stated that we can apply again when or if it is available.

In 2023, the heating cost for City Hall was \$6,040, property insurance \$9,000 per year, and approximately \$5,000 a year to maintain the elevator. It was noted that the elevator is in need of major updates. A resident stated that if we want to build new to be more energy efficient, what is the tradeoff? If we build new to save \$6,000 a year on heating, how long will it take to recover that, adding that the new building would also need to be heated.

The administrator reported that in 2018 EAPC did an assessment, and there was an energy audit completed on the building by ConEd. After the energy audit we updated to LED lighting, and all the furnaces have been replaced and converted to natural gas. We have done needed repairs, but have not done anything major, such as windows etc.

Council member Kenfield explained that every time we have questions and consult with an architect or engineer to help determine where our money would be best spent, to determine what a new building would cost, or what it would cost to repair this building, it costs thousands of dollars. We need to move forward, and we know it is going to cost money, but where is our money best spent. She explained that the poster had preliminary figures, and rough estimates of the different options.

Administrator Schmitz shared that the building was shingled in 2014. After that we started noticing the inside of the gym peeling and flaking. We have been trying for years to find someone to fix the gutters. The metal gutters are from the original

building and have cracked and are leaking. The building has two layers of bricks, and it leaks between the outside layer & inside layer of bricks.

It was suggested that the city look at extending the eaves of the building and then put on new gutters. Replace the boarded-up windows to improve the cosmetic appearance. This work could be done in phases and have a yearly expense.

It was noted that there are other areas in the city such as the pool and the arena that are in need of repair as well.

One resident stated that nothing lasts forever. If this building is deemed untenable, and the city owns the mall that is already handicapped accessible, that is where the city hall should be moved and suggested that the city develops the backside of the mall.

The fact that City Hall is currently a storm shelter was brought up multiple times throughout the discussions. It was noted that additional funding for storm shelters may be available. It was undetermined if we need one at City Hall or if the school has a storm shelter. It was however noted that Hillcrest is a storm shelter, and the Court House is open 24/7.

Council member Kenfield reassured the public that roads and infrastructure are both a very big concern for the council. She stated that they have been trying to get on the MN State bonding bill for funding, but since the House and Senate could not come to an agreement, our funding to complete those projects is gone. Funding for roads and infrastructure comes from a different source than that for a building. Mayor Bertilrud added we have to replace infrastructure before we overlay the streets.

Mayor Bertilrud thanked the public for attending and for their input and questions. He stated that there would not be any decisions made tonight. He asked if they have additional questions or comments to email them to Administrator Schmitz.

The hearing was closed at 6:44 p.m.

Respectively, submitted,

Allen Bertilrud, Mayor
Kathleen Schmitz, City Administrator

The published material is only a summary, the full text is available for public inspection at City Hall, or by standard or electronic mail.